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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 13, 1932.

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Subject: "The Child's Room." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Even old Santa Claus has his problems in an economy year like this. He has to limit his budget and that may rule out an expensive electric train for little Johnny or a life-size doll for Mary Ann. But with the help of clever parents or big brothers and sisters, Santa Claus can bring plenty of Christmas cheer to the youngsters through homemade gifts. Toys made at home may be just as much or more fun than costly playthings. One of the nicest homemade Christmas treats for the child this year might be a room of his own, a playroom or a nursery all fixed up for his comfort and convenience and furnished with only his possessions.

The child phychologists in recent years have been of great help to Santa Claus, They have studied children's needs, the things that make them happy and comfortable and help them to develop into happy, successful grown-ups. And these psychologists declare that every child needs a place of his own, whether it's a whole room or just a corner of a living room, dining room or bedroom. If you have a room in your house that you can devote exclusively to the children, that is the ideal situation. But a corner of the living room, for example, if it is well arranged for the child, can give him a great deal of happiness and a sense of security and possession. If your youngsters have been trying to carry on their own occupations here, there and everywhere around the house, never knowing when the tower of blocks they have so carefully built in the middle of the living room must come down because company is coming, or when the paper dolls must be picked up in a hurry, then they'll appreciate a place where they can play undisturbed. And incidentally their parents will find life more comfortable and the house easier to keep tidy. Fixing up a child's room need not be an expensive job. Father, Mother, Brother and Sister may do most of the work, such as painting walls and small furniture, building low shelves for toys, making curtains and so on. And think of the joy of getting up Christmas morning to find that you have a bright cheerful room or corner all of your very own just as the older members of the house have--a new place set aside especially for this serious business of play.

A mother in La Crosse, Wisconsin, wrote some time ago for advice on fixing up a nursery. I'll tell you what the experts suggest. This information holds good both for a separate nursery or playroom and for a child's corner.

Perhaps you've noticed that children, like flowers, thrive best with plenty of sun and air. These are the first things to think of in planning a room where a child is to spend a great deal of time. That's why a room located on the east, south or west is better for a nursery than a north room. But a room that tends to be a little dark will look more cheerful and sunny if the walls and furnishings are of a cheerful soft yellow color.

Now about backgrounds. Floors, first. Small children spend so much time

on them. Floors for children need to be sanitary, easily cleaned--with soap and water, if possible--durable, not slippery for small feet, and so smooth that little hands will be in no danger of splinters. Linoleum is one of the best finishes for a nursery floor since it fulfills all these requirements. Unless your house is evenly heated, you'll need to consider whether the floor is warm enough to play on. Of course, children need a rug to sit on. The experts favor one large rug instead of several small, scatter rugs. But, large or small, the rug needs non-skid fastenings on its corners for safety's sake. In fact, every item in the child's room needs to be safe for his use.

One clever mother I know who has recently fixed up a room for her children, let the youngsters help her paint a checkerboard and a hop scotch board on the linoleum floor. When the time comes to give up children's games a rug may cover up the white paint. In the meantime, this simple device is giving the youngsters lots of fun and exercise at small cost on dark days when play outside is difficult.

Walls? Here again a washable finish is best. You can paint plain plaster surfaces with lusterless enamel in soft pleasant colors. A gloss finish is not suitable because it causes so much glare. If the room is already painted or if you have decorations that you want to paste on the wall, you can make the walls washable by applying a coat of shellac. Then keeping walls clean won't be difficult even when small sticky fingers have been about.

Colors? Vivid colors have a place in the nursery as in other rooms only in small amounts or "accents" as the decorators say. Large spaces like walls need soft pleasant colors that make good backgrounds for the other furnishings. Such colors as soft creamy yellow, grey green, powder blue in a very sunny room or even ivory white, if the room has bright curtains, rugs and pictures--these are the best shades to choose for walls.

What about pictures? The psychologists advise Santa Claus to select only those that are of real interest to the child and those that will give him pleasure. Too many times nursery decorations appeal to grown-ups but not the children. A decorative border set high up on the walls above the child's range of vision will not mean much to him, though the neighbors, who drop in, may think "it's just too cute for anything." The very young child is interested in pictures of familiar animals, of other children engaged in play like his own, of trains, boats, automobiles, airplanes and other things that he can understand and is familiar with. If pictures or wall decorations are low enough--perhaps only three or four feet from the floor, he can look <u>into</u> them, touch them and enjoy them as he enjoys his picture book. Huge poster pictures are too big for the young child's vision. Very small pictures are also unsuitable for him. As for unpleasant pictures, figures of grotesque or blood-thirsty animals, giants, ogres or savages--these may suggest fear to the child and have no place in his room.

Children need very little furniture but simple and sturdily built. Most of it a father or brother can make at home, if he is handy with his tools. But what furniture the child has should suit his needs. His small chair and table should be of the right size for his comfort and convenience, sturdy and durable yet light enough <u>for him</u> to carry around, a smooth, sanitary, splinterless finish and without nails or sharp corners that might cause trouble. Low, open built-in shelves painted to harmonize with the rest of the room will hold his toys. Since he can easily reach every corner of the shelves himself, he can put away and get out his own playthings and learn habits of neatness and orderliness and care of possessions early. The very large, hollow wooden blocks which psychologists recommend for the small child and which the home carpenter can make will also come in handy for furniture. The child will use them himself for stools and perhaps tables. Oilcloth pillows for the floor are easy to make, inexpensive, washable and they add to the child's comfort.

Tomorrow we'll have a Wednesday menu. Thursday we'll talk about choosing children's toys.